

Servant Leadership as Employee-Organization Approach for Performance of Employee Citizenship Behaviors in the Nigeria's Electric Power Sector

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Abstract

This study is a conceptual paper that will investigate the possible significant effect of servant leadership behaviors on the employee organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Organizational citizenship behaviors are job behaviors which are voluntary, not formally or directly recognized by the organizational reward system, but promote the effectiveness of the organization. Because of its positive relationship with organizational effectiveness, this study is concerned with encouraging its performance among employees of the Nigeria's power sector. The study will specifically be conducted in the Distribution Company (Disco) of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) Plc that is currently experiencing a major reform. The reform program is geared to provide access to private investment, efficient and effective operations of the Nigeria's electric power sector. Efficient and effective operations of the Nigeria's electric power sector are essential for growth and development of all sectors of the Nigeria's economy.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Organization Citizenship Behaviors, Nigeria Electric Power Sector.

Introduction

OCB is defined as employees' willingness to go above and beyond the prescribed roles that he or she has been assigned to do (Organ, 1990). Additionally, OCB behaviors are behaviors that are discretionary, not described by job definitions (Organ, 1988). These behaviors are, therefore, employees' extra-helping behavior that immediately benefits a specific individual and indirectly contributes to an organization. These extra-role behaviors are considered to support the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance in the organization (Organ, 1997). It has also been argued that a high level of OCBs reflects employees' true willingness to be involved in the organization (Chen, Hui & Sego, 1998; Shore, Barkdale & Shore, 1998). Studies have long established that OCB is positively related to employee performance, customer service and satisfaction, (Walz & Niehoff, 2000) and effective service delivery (Bienstock, DeMoranville & Smith, 2003; Castro, 2004; Yoon & Suh, 2003). Generally, OCB promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization as well as employee performance (Organ, 1988).

Servant leadership is a leadership style where leaders place the needs of their subordinates before their own needs and center their efforts on helping subordinates grow to reach their maximum potential and achieve optimal organizational and career success (Greenleaf, 1977). A large number of studies on servant leadership were undertaken to explain the principles and performance of servant leadership (Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Geller, 2009; Han, Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2010; Irving & McIntosh, 2009; Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). However, a few studies (Ehrhart, 2004; Vondey, 2010; Walumbwa, Hartnell & Oke, 2010) have related servant leadership to OCB, and have found positive relationship. One of the prominent early studies that attempted to investigate the effect of servant leadership on OCB is Ehrhart (2004). Results of the study demonstrated that servant leadership indirectly influences

helping behavior and conscientiousness. Additionally, a more recent study carried out by Vondey (2010) revealed that servant leadership significantly but partially correlates with OCB, thus suggesting more studies. Looking at the results of the previous studies which suggest inconclusiveness, and considering that servant leadership and OCB study is still new, there is need for more research. Further investigation of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB will help to provide deeper understanding and increase the validity of the results. Furthermore, all the previous servant leadership-OCB studies have either employed the use of mediators (Ehrhart, 2004; Vondey, 2010), moderators (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Direct relational study of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB may also be needed in organizational behavior literature for particular understanding the direct significant relationship between the two variables.

In line with these observed literature gaps, suggesting the inconclusive nature of past studies, all the authors (Ehrhart, 2004; Vondey, 2010; Walumbwa et al., 2010) have recommended for additional servant leadership-OCB studies for better understanding of the dynamics and strength of their relationships. Against this background, this study is a unique attempt to replicate servant leadership-OCB study within the Nigerian context. Unlike the previous studies, this study is a direct relational study that will test for significance of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB. Therefore, this study is unique in two respects: Firstly, it tries to test the direct relationship between servant leadership and employee OCB. Secondly, this study will employ a new research context. That is this study will be conducted in Nigeria's electric power sector, Nigeria. Most of the previous servant leadership studies (Ehrhart, 2004; Vondey, 2010) were conducted in the developed western countries, thus providing only limited knowledge about the significant influence of servant leadership on employee OCB across other global cultures. This study will contribute to OCB and servant

leadership literature by providing perceptions of the relationship between servant leadership and OCB from a different cultural perspective.

Contextualizing the Study

Nigeria accounts for one-fifth of the population of the African continent and it is ascertained to be very critical to Africa's business and development (Eneh, 2009). However, Nigeria remains inefficient and grossly underdeveloped. Akinlo (2008), therefore, observed that Nigeria cannot develop with high level of inefficiency experienced in the country. To develop the country, there is need to improve efficiency and reduce waste in the public sector as well as to strengthen the private sector as its engine of development (Akinlo, 2008; Wolde-Rufael, 2009). It is widely accepted that growth and development of Nigeria can only be achieved with an efficient power sector because the sector affects every aspect of the economy (Okoro, Govender & Chikuni, 2006).

Although the electric power sector is one of the most important sectors to support the infrastructural development of Nigeria, electricity generation remains underdeveloped and in short supply. National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), a national monopoly organization responsible for electric power generation, transmission and distribution has continued to deteriorate for over about 2 decades despite the huge Nigeria's endowment in natural resources that could facilitate electricity production (Barros, Ibiwoye & Managi, 2011). Among the endowed natural resources that are believed to be highly underutilized, of which some constitute good sources of power generation, include huge gas reserve, coal, solar and hydro resources (Barros et al., 2011). Power generation in Nigeria is mainly from thermal plants, which contributes about 60%, and hydro power plants which generate about 30% (Tallapragada, 2009).

Some of the problems that hamper the effectiveness of NEPA include lack of adequate funding and managerial strategies resulting in the steady decline of the company (Adoghe, 2008). Providing support to this claim, (Barros et al., 2011) stated that when investments are made in the sector, huge part of the investments were undertaken in the area of power generation without a corresponding investment in the transmission and distribution networks, thus making a little or no difference in improving power supply. Associated problems of poor funding include lack of timely routine maintenance. Related to this problem, Ikeme and Ebohon (2005) argued that more than two decades of misguided planning and underinvestment had left a vast supply deficit with no new infrastructure. Consequently, the power sector was at the edge of total collapse with average daily generation of 1,750MW in 1999. The situation did not change after 10 years of civil rule, as the available capacity output was still less than 2.5GW, thus various measures taken in the past to tackle problems of the generation and distribution of the electricity have failed to work (Barros et al., 2011).

Lack of effective functioning of the Nigeria's power sector manifested by epileptic power supply has led to some undesirable economic and social consequences. Some of the negative consequences include business closures and consequent rise in the rate of unemployment (Okereke, 2010). Additionally, Subair and Oke (2008) lamented that supply capacity of the Nigeria's electric power has largely fallen behind demand of the country, and that the shortage often results in equipments malfunctioning. Other negative consequences of lack of effective functioning of the Nigeria's power sector include illegitimate activities such as illegal connections on the national grid, overbilling and under billing, and vandalization of equipments which are then resold, in most cases, to private electricity equipment vendors (Subair & Oke, 2008).

Against this background, the Nigerian government has decided to embark on a reform that is meant to decentralize operations in the power sector. It has been reported that the reform is to solve a myriad of problems, including inadequate power generation capacity, inefficient usage of capacity, limited access to infrastructure, ineffective regulation, low connection rates, lack of capital for investment, insufficient transmission and distribution facilities, high technical losses and vandalism (Adenikinju, 2003). The primary structure affected by this reform was the Nigeria's electric power company, which was the organization that enjoyed monopoly of electric generation, transmission and distribution in Nigeria. This company has experienced change of name three times. The names include Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) from 1951-1972, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) from 1972-2005 and presently Power Holding Company of Nigeria Plc (PHCN) which begins in 2005. The recent change of name is part of the on-going reform.

In sum, this reform aims to achieve the least-cost electricity generation and constant increase in electricity production. Therefore, the Nigerian government restructured the power sector by unbundling NEPA into 18 separate companies composed of 6 electricity-generating companies, 1 Transmission Company and 11 distribution companies. The power sector reform has been designed to encourage private participation by breaking NEPA's monopoly to pave way for private investment called Independent Power Producers (IPPs).

As generally expected with some forms of change, this reform has met with stern resistance from the staff and executives of the PHCN (Okereke, 2010). Therefore, the success of this reform and ultimate improvement of efficiency and effectiveness of Nigeria's power sector will largely be dependent on positive employee outcome. Against this background, this paper

is concerned with making a meaningful contribution for the realization of the success of the present power sector reform from organizational management perspective. This paper proposes a conceptual model comprising of two significant variables, namely servant leadership as the independent variable and employee citizenship behavior (OCB) as the dependent variable. It has been well established in the literature that OCB influences effective functioning of organizations, and also leads to efficient allocation of resources (Organ, 1990). The proposed model which will empirically be tested using the employees of the present Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) Plc is aimed at providing viable strategy for solving the lingering problems of the Nigeria's electric power sector.

Literature Review

When employees are supervised by servant leaders, they increase the occurrence of desirable behaviors that promote efficient and effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). Employees are likely to exhibit positive behaviors as a result servant leadership because of some servant leaders are followers' oriented leaders. Specifically, the focus of servant leadership theory is prioritization of follower's interests, thus servant leader places the interests of his subordinates over and above his/her own (Joseph & Winston, 2005). It has been proposed that the leader's service to the follower results in reciprocal service to the leader by the follower (Winston, 2003). Consequently, servant leadership may be more conducive to organizational citizenship behaviors due to its focus on follower development, community building, authentic leadership, and shared leadership (Graham, 1991; Laub, 2003; Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora, 2008). It has also been argued that the motive of the servant leader's influence is not to direct others but rather to motivate and facilitate service and stewardship by the followers themselves (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004).

Follower's service to co-workers and stewardship of organizational resources are construed as organizational citizenship behaviors (Vondey, 2010).

Specifically, Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008) have shown that servant leadership dimensions of helping subordinates grow, behaving ethically, and creating value for the community are significantly related to community citizenship behaviors, which include personal and organizational community service. Helping subordinates to grow and succeed is supported as a way for servant leaders to influence followers to perform OCB (Ehrhart, 2004). Furthermore, Liden et al.'s (2008) results revealed a significant negative relationship between helping subordinates grow and community citizenship behaviors, thus showing a serious implication for future research and practice. Ethical leadership behavior was proposed to have significant influence on the follower's civic virtue dimension of OCB (Graham, 1991). Their results further showed that behaving ethically had a significant negative relationship with community citizenship behavior, and creating value for the community showed a significant positive relationship with community citizenship behaviors.

Recently, Walumbwa et al. (2010) have demonstrated how the employee attitudes through servant leadership are related to OCB. Their findings broadly revealed that servant leadership is partially significantly related to OCB through the employee perceptions of self efficacy, commitment to the supervisor, procedural justice climate and positive service climate.

Servant Leadership Dimensions

In attempts to define the servant leadership construct, different numbers of inconsistent set of dimensions have been used by different authors (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Page & Wong, 2000; Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Specifically, Vondey (2010) reported that 16 models of

servant leadership have been found in the literature. For the purpose of this study, Liden et al's (2008) seven dimensions will be used. The seven dimensions are operationalized below:

a. Behaving ethically: This means leader interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with others. Example of items concerning behaving ethically includes: my manager holds high ethical standards and my manager is always honest.

b. Helping subordinates grow and succeed: This is an act of demonstrating genuine concern for others' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring.

c. Empowering: Empowering means encouraging and facilitating others, especially immediate followers, in identifying and solving problems, as well as determining when and how to complete work tasks.

d. Putting subordinates first: This is a leader behavior involving the use of actions and words to make it clear to, especially, immediate followers that satisfying their work needs is a priority to the leader. Managers or supervisors who put subordinates first usually break from their own work to assist subordinates with work problems they are faced with.

e. Conceptual skill: This means leader's ability of possessing the knowledge of the organization and tasks at hand so as to be in a position to effectively support and assist others, especially immediate followers.

f. Creating value for the community: This servant leadership dimension refers to a conscious and genuine concern for helping the community by offering service to help them achieve their objectives.

g. Emotional healing: This dimension is concerned with supervisor's act of showing sensitivity to others' personal concerns.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior Dimensions

Over the four decades of OCB research, the OCB construct has been conceptualized in several ways (e.g., Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, 1988; Smith et al., 1983; Van Dyne, Graham & Dienesch, 1994; Williams & Anderson, 1991), thus indicating the lack of consensus in its dimensions (Khalid, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2000). However, one of the popular OCB construct (Moorman & Blakely, 1995) has been considered for this study. The construct has four dimensions including individual initiative, interpersonal helping, loyal boosterism, and personal industry. The dimensions have been operationalized below.

1. Interpersonal helping: This is concerned with employee going out his/her way to help co-workers with work-related problems, and showing genuine concern and courtesy toward co-workers, even under the most trying business or personal situations.

2. Individual initiative: This is concerned with behaviors that involve open and sincere expression of opinions and motivating others to do the same on issues that may have serious consequences on the organization even when majority may disagree.

3. Personal industry: This involves employee behavior of personal dedication and sacrifice in discharging his/her responsibilities.

4. Loyal boosterism: This is the employee behaviors that involves show of personal concern for the organization for the progress and sustainability of the organization, for example defending his/her organization when other employees criticize it, and encouraging family, friends and other potential users to patronize organization's products.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study is derived from the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). The basic premise of social exchange theory is that relationships providing more rewards than costs will yield enduring mutual trust and

attraction (Blau, 1964). These social transactions incorporate both material benefits and psychological rewards including status, loyalty and approval (Yukl, 1994). Central to both social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity is the concept of unspecified obligations. That is, when one party does a favor for another, there is an expectation of some future return from the other party. These obligations may be enacted in the form of citizenship behaviors and over time, a pattern of reciprocity evolves, resulting in perceived balance in the exchange relationship (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Rousseau, 1989). Citizenship behaviors are more likely to be under an individual's control, and hence more likely to be a salient mode of reciprocation (Organ, 1990).

Receiving contributions of social exchange creates positive affect and a moral obligation to support the donor, which is socially and psychologically sanctioned by norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Eventually, however, the form and timing of reciprocation lies in the discretion of the receiver and cannot be enforced. Experienced states of psychological indebtedness and positive expectations of the exchange partners' intentions are both antecedents and consequences of social exchange, developing gradually when repeated interactions are perceived as balanced and fair (Molm et al., 2000). In purely economic exchange, no further commitments sustain after a transaction is completed. Contrarily, successful social exchange generates "feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust on an ongoing basis" (Blau, 1964, p. 94).

Exchange relationships with the organization and with one's immediate supervisor are of great significance to subordinate employees (Jawahar & Carr, 2007). Based on the previously mentioned theorem of unspecified obligations which is central to both the social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity, employees' exchange relationship with the organization is

influenced greatly by unspecified obligations. Servant leadership behaviors are a good mechanism for this unspecified obligation to develop among employees. Specifically, servant leader's genuine love, personal development of the employees and concern for their welfare, may result to development of unspecified obligations on the side of employees to perform extra-role behaviors. Therefore, employee OCB can be as a result of satisfaction with organizational leadership style of servant leader experienced in the course of normal day-to-day relationships with the leader. This study is concerned with investigating the effects of servant leadership on the employee OCB.

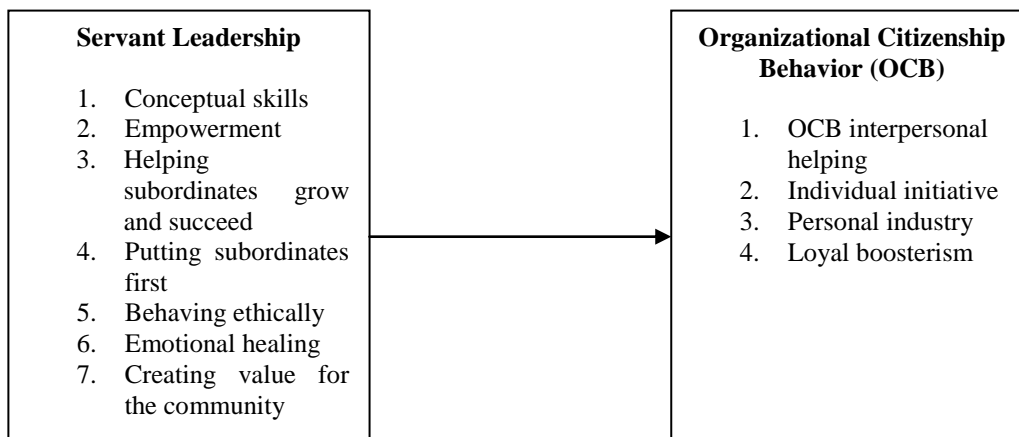


Figure 1. Model of relationship between servant leadership behaviors and employee organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that servant leadership predicts employee OCB (Ehrhart, 2004). The theoretical framework for this argument is derived from Greenleaf (1977), who believed that leaders who serve their followers would produce followers who serve others. Thus, a leader is a role model for followers, and employee OCB is influenced by models (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). People learn from observing others and modeling what they see. Hence, the implication of Greenleaf's preposition for this study, as depicted in Figure 1, is if employees experience and observe a leader serving others, followers themselves will in turn serve others. This service could entail helping co-workers, promoting the organization to

outsiders, and encouraging others to express their ideas and opinions, thus performing organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

Research Methodology

Population and Sample of the study:

Population of the study refers to the entire group of people, events or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Sekaran and Bougie further state that population of the study is the group of people, events or things of interest for which the researcher wants to make inferences based on the derived sample. This study will focus on the PHCN distribution companies in north-western part of Nigeria. North-west has been selected for this study because it is the most populated geo-political zone with estimated population of 35.8 million out of a total estimated Nigerian population of 140 million (NPC, 2006). As a result of this, north-west represents an important Nigeria's zone to the operations and sustainability of PHCN.

A sample is a set of individuals or respondents selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey (Salant & Dillman, 1994). To select sample for this study, cluster sampling technique will be employed. Cluster sampling is a sampling technique in which the entire population of interest is divided into groups or clusters and a random sample of these clusters is selected (Sarndal, Swenson & Wreman, 1992). A sample size of 322 has been determined for this study. Two business units will be randomly selected to obtain the sample. Two units will be selected because each unit has 200 employees, thus amounting to a total of 400 which is larger than the determined sample size. This study will consider all 400 employees in the two sampled clusters. The selected sample will be representative of the

population and is economical as well. It is economical because the size of the sampled clusters is manageable in terms of cost and time. Time and cost are important considerations to researchers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Methods of Data Collection

This study will employ field study design where the two research constructs will be examined. Cross-sectional survey method will be employed. Cross-sectional survey method is chosen for this study to avoid long time consumption that characterized the longitudinal research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The researcher with assistance of employed assistants will distribute questionnaires to sample elements of Kano Distribution Company (DISCO) of the PHCN. Follow-ups using personal contact, telephone and email will be done to ensure timely completion and collection of distributed questionnaires. As an inducement for quick response each respondent will be given a biro with Universiti Utara Malaysia emblem.

Design of Data Collection Method

A structured questionnaire consisting of 52 closed ended multiple choice-questions will be employed for the survey. The instrument comprises of 28 related to servant leadership, 19 questions related to OCB, and 5 questions related to demographical variables. The Likert-type scale is considered more appropriate and reliable for measuring the respondents' perception and attitudes (Alreck & Settle, 1995; Miller, 1991). The instrument will measure the key variables of the research using a 7-point itemized scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It was stated that 7-point measurement scale is more reliable (Krosnick & Fabrigar, 1997). They further stated that the scale also gives the respondents independence of expressing their feelings without limiting their choices.

Measures

Servant leadership

The servant leadership behaviors will be measured using the Liden et al.'s (2008) seven dimension-model. The seven dimensions include helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, creating value for the community, emotional healing, empowerment, and conceptual skills. The Liden et al.'s (2008) measurement scale was adopted in this study largely because the measure was reported to be the most valid instrument for measuring servant leadership considering the rigorous tests for validity and reliability it has gone through at development stage (Liden et al., 2008). Previous coefficient alphas for these dimensions ranged from .76 to .85 (Vondey, 2010).

Organizational citizenship behavior

Moorman and Blakely's (1995) four dimension OCB construct of interpersonal helping, individual initiative, personal industry, and loyal boosterism have been selected for this study. The instrument has been selected for this study because each dimension focuses on different aspects of organizational life (Vondey, 2010).

Statements Of Hypotheses

Based on the reviewed literatures regarding servant leadership and OCB, it can be hypothesized that servant leader behaviors would be antecedent of follower organizational citizenship behavior. Hence, the following specific relationships have been hypothesized:

H1: The servant leadership behaviors of conceptual skills, empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, emotional healing, creating value for the community significantly influence the follower interpersonal helping.

H2: The servant leadership behaviors of conceptual skills, empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, emotional healing, creating value for the community significantly influence the follower individual initiative.

H3: The servant leadership behaviors of conceptual skills, empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, emotional healing, creating value for the community significantly influence the follower personal industry.

H4: The servant leadership behaviors of conceptual skills, empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, emotional healing, creating value for the community significantly influence the follower loyal boosterism.

Conclusion

Studies have suggested that servant leadership influences employee or follower OCB. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), as job behaviors which are voluntary, not formally or directly recognized by the organizational reward system, promote the effectiveness of the organization. Examples of citizenship behaviors include but not limited to helping a co-worker with a job-related problem, promoting the image of an employee's organization, supporting the organizational goals, and offering suggestions to the management. This paper is an attempt to contribute to theory building of OCB and servant leadership as well as making meaningful contribution to management practice. The paper

therefore seeks to empirically assess the influence of servant leadership on employees' willingness to engage in OCB by using the PHCN distribution companies in the north-western part of Nigeria. This paper will, therefore, bridge the literature gap by providing firsthand information regarding the relationship between servant leadership behaviors and employees' willingness to engage in OCB within a new research context (Nigeria). This study that provides a new cross-cultural perspective of servant leadership-OCB relationship will no doubt help to enrich the organizational behavior literature. However, this study would practically provide framework for improving effective functioning of the Nigeria's power sector, particularly the PHCN. The model of this study would guide stakeholders of the company to understand yet an additional important management approach for influencing employee performance that has potential to assist the organization management to achieve the current power sector reform.

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